



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

News Release

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GOVERNOR

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For Immediate Release: December 3, 2009

DLNR TO INVESTIGATE POSSIBLE INADVERTENT DAMAGE TO KEAWAKAPU REEF DURING DEPLOYMENT OF ARTIFICIAL REEF FORMS

Further deployments suspended pending development of protocols to prevent future occurrence

HONOLULU – The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) has suspended deployment of artificial reef forms while it investigates the extent of inadvertent damage that may have been caused to live coral when concrete modules were submerged to expand the Keawakapu artificial reef off the coast of Maui.

Yesterday, DLNR began submerging 1,400 concrete “Z” module forms to add to the artificial reef located a half mile off Keawakapu at depths of 77 to 120 feet to create additional marine life habitat.

Although all the concrete forms were dropped within the designated artificial reef zone as established in 1962, biologists from the Division of Aquatic Resources have determined that 2 or 3 percent of the total may have landed on live coral present within the largely sandy area designated for this artificial reef.

DLNR has begun an investigation into the extent of, and factors leading to this incident, as well as the appropriate level of mitigation. DLNR’s aquatic incident response coordinator, who investigates reef damage cases for the department, will conduct an internal investigation with the same rigor as other cases that have involved coral damage. In addition, DLNR will arrange for an independent investigation by a qualified third party.

“As stewards of Hawai‘i’s natural resources, we regret this unfortunate event and take full responsibility for any possible damage to live coral. We have suspended any further deployment of materials to the state’s artificial reefs until we can thoroughly investigate this matter, and the

Department is able to determine exactly what happened in this case,” said Laura H. Thielen, DLNR chairperson. “Once the extent of the possible damage that may have occurred is known, we will take immediate action to restore the live coral to the extent possible.”

“DLNR will use the findings of our internal investigation as well as an independent investigation to institute standard operating procedures to ensure that this type of incident does not occur again in the future. Among the action steps we plan to take are preparing revised internal protocols for site selection, monitoring deployment, and subsequent inspection of artificial reefs, which will be vetted by an independent source such as the University of Hawai‘i or a federal agency, to ensure we avoid future damage to our precious reefs,” she said.

Prior to the deployment of the concrete modules, DLNR divers, with the assistance of a local dive operator familiar with the area, surveyed the site to identify any sensitive habitat within the potential impact area. During the scan, they discovered and marked a very small patch of live reef and marked the submerged Saint Anthony vessel that forms part of the current artificial reef. They located an appropriate location away from the reef patch and vessel for the new deployment and checked the surrounding area to insure that there was no live reef.

The State of Hawai‘i established the artificial reef program in 1961 to create additional marine life habitat in sandy or barren nearshore areas, increase the diversity of reef fish in these areas and raise fish biomass and recreational opportunities. Since that time, five artificial reefs have been established -- four off O‘ahu and one off Maui. The reefs are comprised mainly of concrete "z-modules", other concrete material, barges, large truck tires, and several small vessels. Together they comprise a total of 2,027 acres of underwater habitat for fish, invertebrate, corals and other sea life.

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